

### 3.5 Existing Circulation Framework

The study area is centered on two principal east-west circulation routes, Auburn Avenue and Edgewood Avenue, but is also intersected by several large north-south thoroughfares which in many cases decrease pedestrian mobility along Auburn and Edgewood while increasing motor vehicle congestion. Both Piedmont Avenue and Courtland Street are major vehicular conduits serving all of Downtown, with fairly high volumes of traffic at high speeds. Pedestrian access and safety at the intersections of these streets and Auburn / Edgewood could be improved with added traffic calming measures. The same holds true for Boulevard.

In addition, Interstate 75/85 crosses over the study area and cuts it in half. This creates two major issues: the space of the viaduct under the expressway (discussed in Section 3.6), and the design and character of Edgewood. The cross-section of Edgewood is five lanes wide below the viaduct in large part due to the interstate access ramps, with southbound I-75/85 access provoking both a dedicated left-turn lane and a split entry. It is questionable whether current traffic volumes warrant the dedicated lane; and the split entry not only cuts off southbound Bell Street but adds an unnecessary pedestrian obstacle.

By combining the two entry ramps into one, the intersection would be easier and safer for pedestrians to navigate and Bell could continue through to serve the Sweet Auburn Curb Market. It should be noted that both Auburn and Edgewood are major pedestrian corridors. Edgewood lacks a coordinated streetscape; Auburn's pedestrian environment was updated for the Olympics prior to 1996 but has not been maintained and is deteriorating in several places.

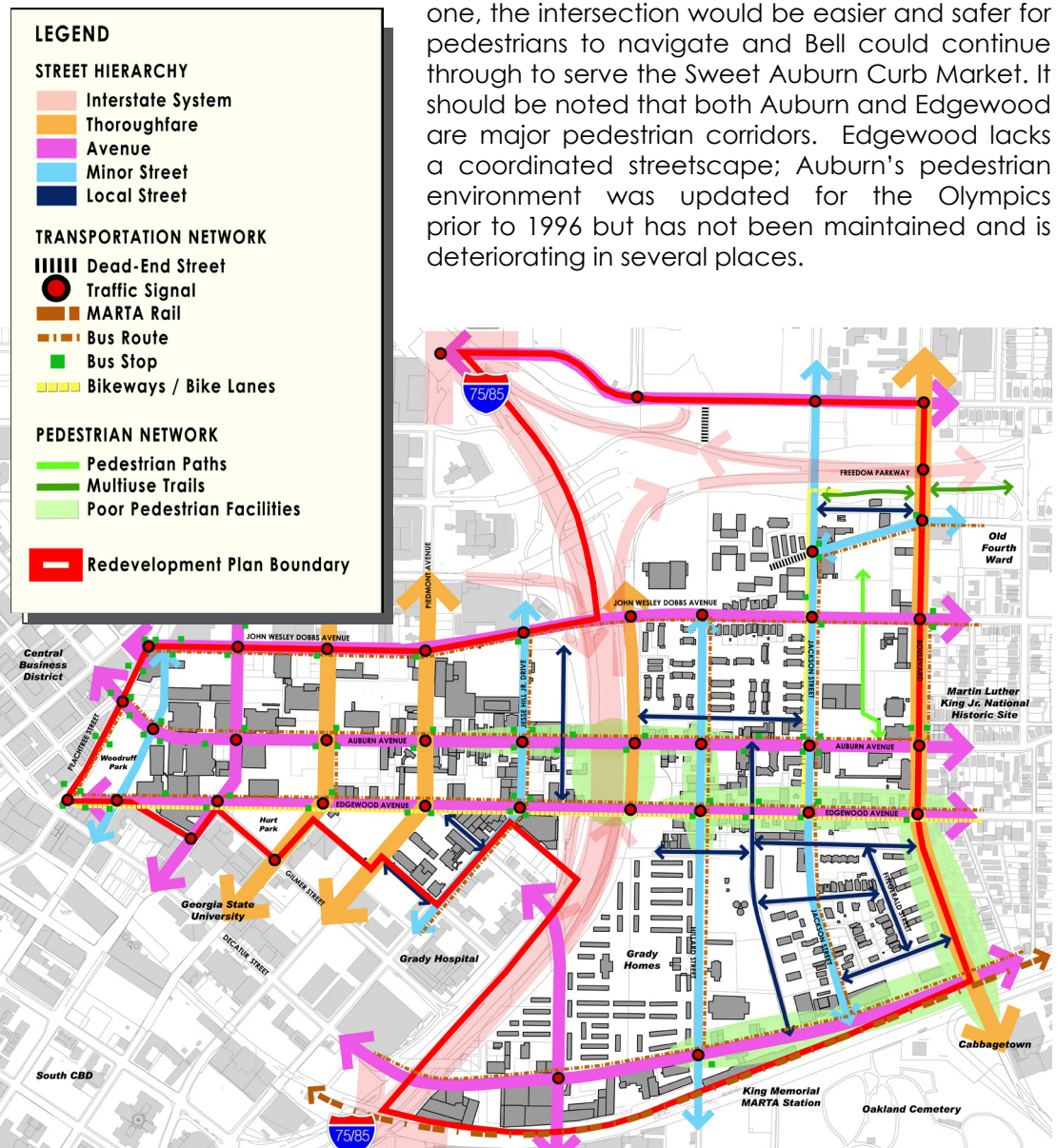


Figure 3.5:  
Existing Circulation  
Framework



### 3.6 Existing Open Space Framework

Considering the location within the innermost core of the city, the study area is relatively well-served with parks and open space, although better maintenance and connections are necessary in some instances. On the east, Woodruff Park and Hurt Park are the two principal open spaces, and both are well-designed and in good condition. On the west, the rose garden and grounds of the King National Historic Site work in harmony with the plaza and reflecting pool surrounding the sarcophagus, marking the transition from Sweet Auburn to the Old Fourth Ward. To the north, the western extension of Freedom Park adds a small but significant strip of open space, effectively bringing this 187-acre asset to the community's doorstep. The long-term plan calls for a ceremonial greenway connecting the King Center with the Carter Center.

Other public spaces need attention. Butler Park, 3.4 acres on the south, is underutilized and under-maintained, although it has a recreation center, a playground and several tennis and basketball courts. It is included in the redevelopment master plan for Grady Homes and identified as a target for renovation and intensification of active uses. Dobbs Plaza is likewise suffering from neglect. It occupies a key location midway between the eastern and western ends of Sweet Auburn, but is adversely affected by the presence of the interstate viaduct. It is included as part of Redevelopment Project 7.

Although unimproved, the area under the viaduct is a de facto public space by virtue of its state ownership and open terrain. It is an inhospitable place that is perceived as dark and dangerous, and discouraging to pedestrians despite wide sidewalks and lighting. It needs a strong plan for improvement and carefully-considered program.

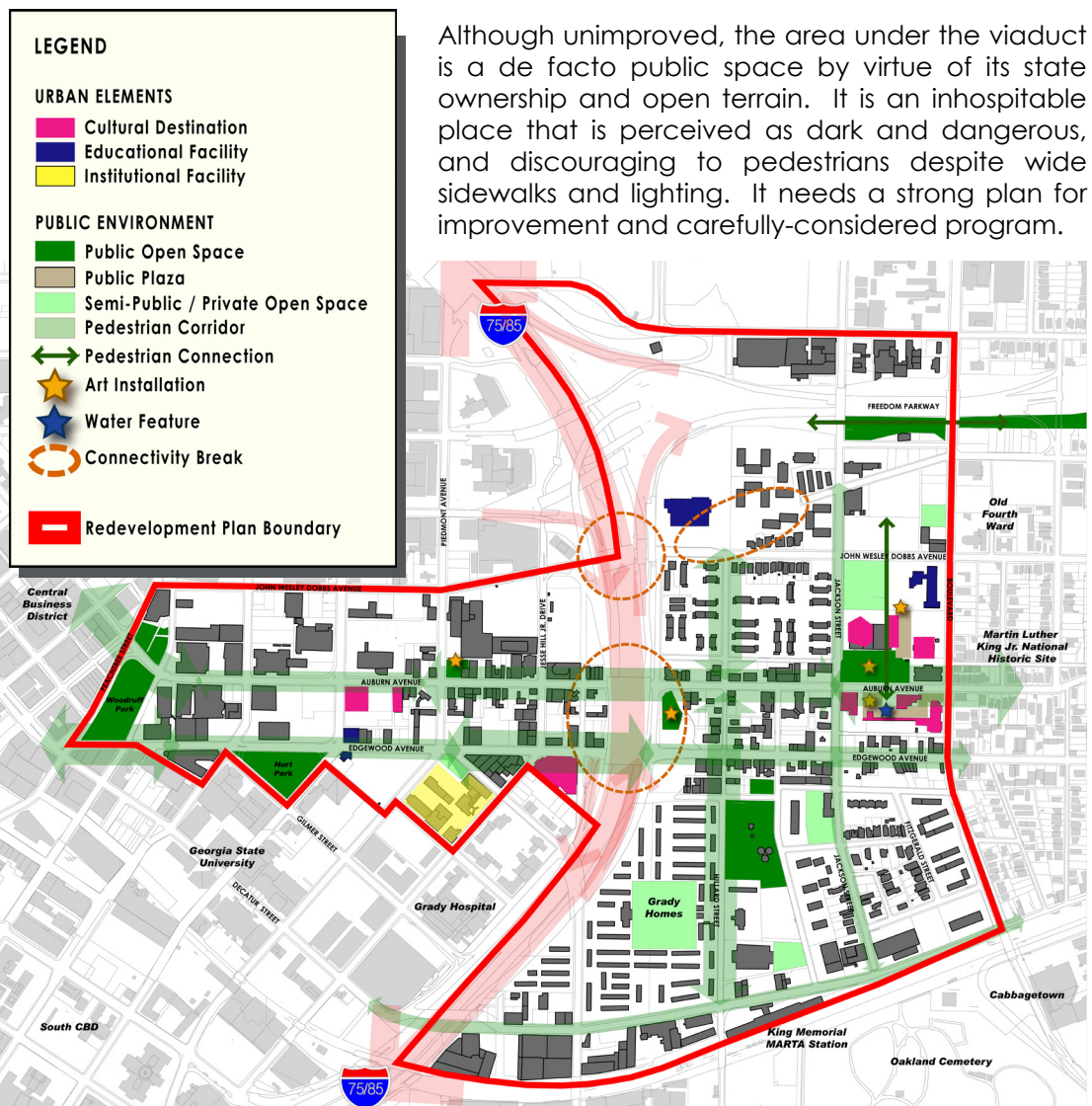


Figure 3.6:  
Existing Open Space  
Framework



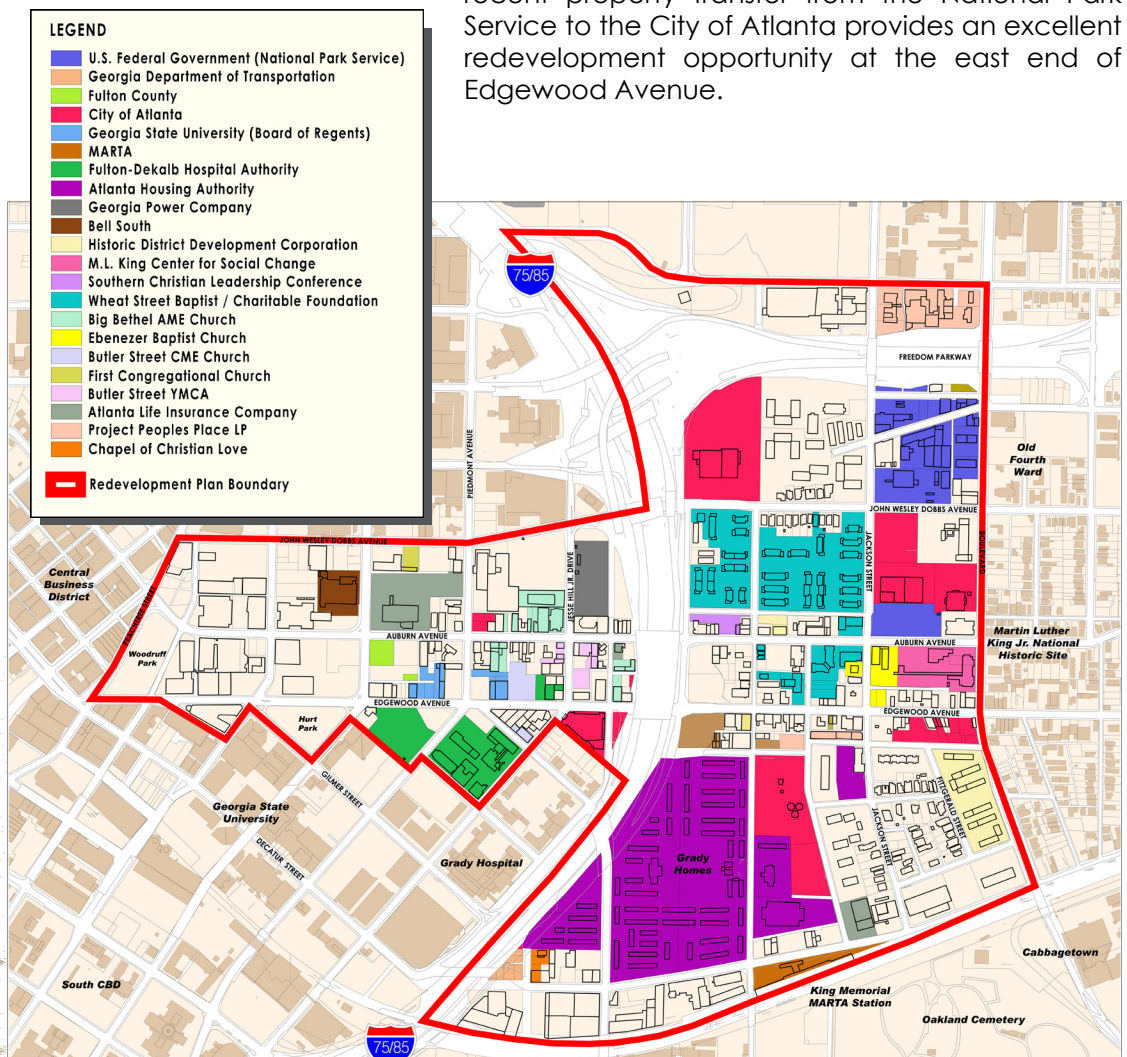
### 3.7 Significant Property Ownership

The study area is dominated in its eastern half by large institutional landholdings. Perhaps the most significant is Grady Homes and Antoine Graves, 14.5 acres of multifamily and senior housing owned by the Atlanta Housing Authority. A similar large residential complex is Wheat Street Gardens, 11.3 acres owned by the Wheat Street Charitable Foundation. Together with other smaller parcels, the combined acreage owned by Wheat Street Baptist Church and Wheat Street Charitable is 14.8 – the largest private holdings in the area. The federal government also owns a significant amount of land in conjunction with the King National Historic Site – 11.1 acres north of Auburn Avenue. These major assemblages form the basis of several redevelopment projects discussed in Part IV.

The western half of the study area is more fragmented. The largest landholders are the Fulton-Dekalb Hospital Authority with portions of its Grady Hospital campus extending into Sweet Auburn; Atlanta Life Insurance with 3.4 acres containing the Herndon Plaza office building and surface parking; and Big Bethel AME Church with just over 2 acres not including parcels associated with Sweet Auburn Village. As above, Atlanta Life and Big Bethel parcels are the basis of two redevelopment projects.

Other smaller (but no less important) landowners in the study area include Georgia State University and Butler Street YMCA on the west; and Ebenezer Baptist Church, the Historic District Development Corporation, and the King Center on the east. A recent property transfer from the National Park Service to the City of Atlanta provides an excellent redevelopment opportunity at the east end of Edgewood Avenue.

Figure 3.7:  
Significant Property  
Ownership





### 3.8 Development / Redevelopment Opportunities

In general, development opportunities in the study area include vacant properties and deteriorated or underutilized structures. Due to the historic nature of the area, preservation and rehabilitation is instrumental and several important properties suggest additional redevelopment projects. Much of the far eastern side of the study area is already built out and provides limited opportunity for new development; however, as you move west through the study area, development and redevelopment opportunities increase.

The many existing and often historic structures constrain development opportunities to only portions of blocks or sometimes even only single parcels. Still, on the northeast side of the study area there are two major development opportunities in the current Wheat Street Gardens and Atlanta Overlook sites. Both are currently home to deteriorating apartment buildings and are prime locations for large new residential and mixed-use projects. In addition, the National Park Service surface parking facility located across Jackson Street from these apartment complexes offers an excellent opportunity to intensify municipal parking while introducing some larger-scale retail and mixed-use projects in the future.

Finally, the block between Auburn and Edgewood bounded on the west by Dobbs Plaza and on the east by Hilliard is a superb site for a new mixed-use development with a cultural component that could serve the entire study area and link the two halves.

Figure 3.8:  
Development/  
Redevelopment  
Opportunities





### 3.9 Stakeholder Issues

Several predominant issues resonated with a majority of stakeholders during interviews. In seven categories, the highlights are as follows:

**Land Use and Development:** Wheat Street Gardens and Overlook are the most immediate large development opportunities and deserve attention; Big Bethel has interest in the adjacent Beaudry Ford parking lot.

**Economic Development:** Under-realized potential for cultural tourism; concerted marketing effort needed for district; 27,000 square feet new retail at Sweet Auburn Village; economic impact of GSU students.

**Housing:** Major new housing opportunities in Grady Homes, Wheat Street Gardens and Overlook; concern for provision of affordable housing; concern for displacement of existing residents.

**Historic and Natural Resources:** Retaining the historic character of Sweet Auburn is extremely important; important historic resources such as Atlanta Life and the Prince Hall Masons Building have restoration plans or support; Sweet Auburn Village will act as a case study of integrating preservation and new development.

**Traffic and Transportation:** The Auburn / Edgewood trolley is a major community priority; limited parking is an issue, especially during church services; vehicular speed and volume presents problems at Courtland, Piedmont and Boulevard intersections.

**Community Facilities / Social Services:** There are crime, drug and homeless problems facing the area, especially around Calhoun Park and the I-75/85 viaduct; an independent leadership entity needs to manage the growth of Sweet Auburn.

**Urban Design:** Hilliard Street is an important north-south axis; the National Park Service is vital to the preservation of historic resources; there are opportunities for downtown views from many places; the viaduct presents a major urban design challenge.

Additional stakeholder issues can be found in the meeting minutes contained in Appendix B.

Figure 3.9:  
Stakeholder Issues  
Matrix

Land Use and Development	Economic Development	Housing	Historic and Natural Resources	Traffic and Transportation	Community Facilities / Social Services	Urban Design
<p>Mixed-use redevelopment plans are underway for two major properties - Wheat Street Gardens and Atlanta Overlook</p> <p>Wheat Street Charitable (WSC) is also considering redevelopment ideas for the two Plaza buildings and parcels near the church</p> <p>WSC and Overlook are amenable to 'bundling' their redevelopment projects into a consolidated package for TAD funding, possibly with the NPS site</p> <p>Sweet Auburn Village is moving into pre-sales, with construction planned for early 2006</p> <p>Land values average around \$45-\$50 per sq. ft. with the high end at \$80</p> <p>Long term plans call for redevelopment of the Beaudry surface lot and Bethel Tower by Big Bethel</p> <p>Butler YMCA could be a good candidate for office uses</p>	<p>The legacy of Reverend William Holmes Borders includes faith-based economic development and incubator office space</p> <p>There is a recognition of the economic development potential of MLK / NPS tourism, but caution that bussing used during the Olympics would be repeated</p> <p><i>The story of 'Sweet Auburn' is generally unknown and needs a concerted PR / marketing effort</i></p> <p>Sweet Auburn Village will add 27,000 sq. ft. of storefront retail to the corridor, with a mix of local and neighborhood retailers</p> <p>Retail rents are targeted at \$19-\$22 per sq. ft. at Sweet Auburn Village</p> <p>The initial thought is to provide 30,000 sq. ft. of retail along Jackson Street in the Overlook redevelopment</p>	<p>The redevelopment of Grady Homes may add 850+ housing units to the area</p> <p>The redevelopment of Wheat Street Gardens may add 500+ housing units to the area</p> <p>Affordable housing is central to Wheat Street Charitable, with a 1:1 replacement desired at Wheat Street Gardens</p> <p>The redevelopment of Overlook may add up to 600 housing units to the area, at an average price of \$275 per sq. ft. (\$350K)</p> <p>Overlook may include 20% affordable units, and will be primarily owner-occupied</p> <p>Existing residents of Overlook will be relocated if desired</p> <p>The Houston Square apartment complex is part of the Overlook project</p> <p>Sweet Auburn Village will add 160 condominium units to the area, at an average price of \$220,000</p> <p>Existing single-family areas need to be improved</p>	<p><i>Retaining the historic character of Auburn is extremely important to some stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>The NPS is involved in negotiations to preserve the SCLC building</i></p> <p>The historic Atlanta Life buildings have been planned for renovation</p> <p>There are varied opinions on the preservation of the single-family homes on Dobbs</p> <p>The historic Casino will contain an interpretive installation with a portion of the arched roof preserved</p> <p>Mutual Federal is being preserved and may contain a bank</p> <p>The small insurance building at Sweet Auburn Village will have its facade restored</p> <p>Current plans call for the reconstruction of the Rucker building facade</p> <p>The Herndon building facade should be preserved, but reuse has strong challenges</p>	<p>Limited parking in the corridor is a problem, including church overflow on Sundays</p> <p>Wheat Street Baptist needs around 200 spaces for its congregation, and additional parking at the Towers due to the increasing numbers of seniors with cars</p> <p>There is widespread support for trolley or streetcar running down Auburn Avenue</p> <p>The pedestrian environments at the railroad viaducts needs improvement</p>	<p><i>Crime and drug trade issues plague the corridor, especially around Calhoun Park and along Hilliard</i></p> <p>A new Fulton County branch library has recently opened in the Goode - Van Slyke Building</p> <p>A portion of the East-side TAD funds must go community needs / projects</p> <p><i>Walden Middle is in need of transformation, especially in its physical plant and grounds</i></p> <p>Community support of redevelopment plans is important to Wheat Street Charitable and Overlook</p> <p><i>An independent leadership entity that is devoted to "what's good for Auburn" should be created</i></p>	<p>The Overlook team is following the design leads of Imagine, including the extension of the Freedom Park greenway</p> <p>The initial concept for Overlook includes an internal street</p> <p>There is a need for facade improvements on the Royal Peacock and adjacent buildings</p> <p>The rooftop amenities area of Sweet Auburn Village benefits from the Downtown view</p> <p>Hilliard needs definition as the main north-south axis of the district</p> <p>The NPS can contribute in the restoration of additional buildings important to Sweet Auburn and Civil Rights</p> <p><i>Fire Station No. 6 will be converted into a fire museum beginning in 2003?</i></p> <p><i>A historic multifamily building behind Fire Station No. 6 will be converted to the John Lewis Civil Rights Center?</i></p>





### 3.10 Comparative Findings of Slum and Blight

Seven indicators of slum and blight were listed in the 1994 Butler-Auburn Redevelopment Plan as the basis for consideration as a redevelopment area. Little has changed in the intervening ten years, although there have been signs of some positive economic activity. Each indicator is addressed and updated below:

**Structural Deficiencies and Deterioration:** Approximately 50% of the existing building stock is in substandard condition or worse, although there are ongoing plans to address and improve major properties. The 1994 Redevelopment Plan reported 32% of the built environment as substandard condition or worse. There has been little, if any, active renovation since 1994 – and it can be safely assumed that the general condition of buildings has at best held constant, but more probably has declined.

**Conflicting Land Use and Circulation:** There has been no change to the street network or traffic engineering since 1994, nor have there been any significant changes in land use. In three cases, light industrial / commercial uses have transitioned to multifamily residential and live-work, somewhat mitigating the conflicts between industrial and residential areas. The railroad is an ongoing presence in the southern end of the study area; and although abrupt land use changes are inevitable in cities, there has been no attempt since 1994 to provide suitable buffers. There has been no change in single-family residential subdivision patterns either; residential lots below minimum lot size standards surveyed in 1993 still exist.

**Infrastructure Obsolescence and Disrepair:** A major change in the study area infrastructure has been the Olympic streetscape installed on Auburn Avenue from Peachtree Street to the King Center. Minor streetscape improvements have been provided as part of individual building projects such as the Loudermilk Center (Atlanta Regional Commission Building) and the SunTrust parking deck. However, the Auburn streetscape has not been maintained and is in obvious disrepair in several places. Its heightened profile and considerable investment draws attention to this problem and compounds the impression of a derelict environment. Besides Auburn and the few random instances of improvements, the balance of visible infrastructure has not changed since 1994.

**Vacant Land and Unoccupied Buildings:** As previously mentioned, there has been little construction in the study area since 1994. The windshield survey found 60 out of 408 parcels vacant, or 15% of the total parcels in the study area. In terms of acreage, 7% of the study area or 15.8 acres lie vacant. Vacant parcels roughly correlate with the 1993 CODA survey, although vacant acreage has mildly decreased. However, adding surface parking lots to the count, the vacant and underutilized parcels jump to 30% of the study area, or 16% of the total acreage. At 34 acres, this exceeds the CODA observations of vacant land. In terms of the built environment, surface parking equates to essentially vacant land in dense urban settings. Additionally, there remain significant historic structures along Auburn and Edgewood which are unoccupied, under-occupied or physically neglected.

**Tax Delinquency:** Current tax delinquency information was unavailable for this analysis. The contention that under-utilized parcels and buildings represent a missed opportunity for tax revenue still holds true. This is attested to by virtue of the adoption of an Eastside Tax Allocation District (TAD), which was formulated on the basis of underperforming tax revenue in the area.

**Adverse Economic and Social Conditions:** The study area is largely covered by two census tracts – 13121-28 and 13121-33. Correlation between census areas surveyed in 1994 and 2005 may not be exact, since some tract boundaries may have changed and small portions of the study area (the west end and northwest corner) in other tracts are excluded from this overview. Edgewood Avenue roughly divides Tracts 28 and 33, with Tract 28 extending north and containing Wheat Street Gardens and Atlanta Overlook; and Tract 33 extending south and



containing Grady Homes and the Jackson / Fitzgerald neighborhood. Overall, population increased in both tracts but at a greater rate in 28, probably due to new multifamily construction; households increased with the same frequency. Population growth in Tract 33 held steady with the city as a whole, at 6%; Tract 28 outstripped the city at 49%. Median household income – correcting for inflation – increased in both tracts as well (7% in 28, 20% in 33). However, median household income is still well below the city value of \$34,770 in both tracts, at 44% in Tract 28 and 29% in Tract 33.

**General Environmental Conditions:** This final indicator can be included verbatim from the 1994 Plan as the contention remains true today: *“The expressways, arterial traffic streets, and the industrial fringes of Butler Street / Auburn Avenue create noise, air pollution and traffic congestion. Arterial streets lack safe pedestrian crossings, internal streets and walks are devoid of landscaping, and the commercial and institutional areas of the district seriously lack off-street parking. As a result, these conditions reduce the livability of the residential areas and hinder the provision of safe and attractive conditions for visitors to the neighborhood's historic and cultural resources.”*

The fact that most of the study area has remained unchanged has kept the need for a redevelopment area intact, and the need for a renewed community vision essential.

Figure 3.10:  
Conditions of Blight

